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ABSTRACT

The NEW (Nontraditional Employment for Women Act) Work for Women project at Dundalk Community College (DCC) encourages and assists women in entering nontraditional fields, especially the building and construction trades. The program provides comprehensive services in outreach and awareness of nontraditional careers, career counseling, education, training, job placement, and retention assistance. The target population includes women who meet Job Training Partnership Act eligibility requirements, are at least 18 years of age, are Baltimore County residents, and have basic reading and math skills. The majority of the program's clients have been classified as "low income" according to federal guidelines, or have been recipients of unemployment benefits or Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). A variety of channels have been used for recruitment, including activities focusing on AFDC recipients and employment specialists. Interested, eligible women are invited to a 1-day workshop on nontraditional employment, followed by an assessment day where the Adult Basic Learning Examination, Holland Self-Directed Search, and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator are administered. A personal interview and individualized program plan follow. Selected women enter a 12-week intensive pre-apprenticeship program providing training in industrial measurements, career and life skills, physical condition, basic skills, blueprint reading, occupational safety and health, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and first aid. Partnerships with business and labor provide job placement linkages, and job retention is increased through mentor support. Program results exceeded grant goals; 600 women attended the AFDC presentation; 77 attended the one-day workshop; 63 women were assessed; 35 enrolled in the NEW program; 27 graduated; and (6) 26 were placed into nontraditional jobs. Program challenges include recruitment, dispelling myths about male dominated careers, placing women in the building trades during a recession, and working within federal program time constraints, (KP)

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NEW WORK FOR WOMEN: A MODEL PROGRAM FOR NONTRADITIONAL CAREERS

Presented at the NETWORK Conference

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by

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NEW WORK FOR WOMEN: A MODEL PROGRAM FOR NONTRADITIONAL CAREERS

Introduction and Statement of Funding

The Nontraditional Employment for Women Act of 1991 contains the following statements:

"...Over 7,000,000 families in the United States live in poverty, and over half of those families are single-parent households headed by women..."

"...employment in traditionally male occupations leads to higher wages, improved job security, and better long-range opportunities than employment in traditionally female-oriented fields..."

"...the long-term economic security of women is served by increasing nontraditional employment opportunities for women..."

The NEW Work for Women project at Dundalk Community College has developed and implemented a program to encourage and assist women in entering careers in nontraditional fields, especially the building and construction trades. This program is the result of the NEW Act of 1991 which was enacted by the U.S. Congress to amend JTPA and encourage a broader range of training and job placement for women. The NEW Act marked the first time the job training system was required to respond to the needs of women for

higher paying positions. Most low income or unemployed women participating in job training programs have long been funneled into positions traditionally held by women, such as clerical, day care, nursing assistant, hotel housekeeping, etc.; those fields that offer low pay, few benefits, and little opportunity for advancement.

The NEW legislation authorized the Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor to give demonstration grants to six states to develop replicable nontraditional job training programs for women. Maryland received one of the first six grants, which was divided between Baltimore County at DCC, which developed a model program for urban areas and Carroll County's project, which was developed for rural women. To fulfill the requirements of this grant, DCC forged a partnership with the Baltimore County Office of Employment and Training, the Maryland Department of Economic and Employment Development, and the Baltimore Building and Construction Trades Training Council, AFL-CIO.

The NEW Work for Women project provides comprehensive services in the areas of outreach and awareness of nontraditional careers, career counseling, education, training, and job placement and retention assistance. While the primary focus of the program is to help women become competitive in applying for apprenticeships and on-the-job training programs in the building and construction trades, the New project assists women in obtaining employment in a wide range of nontraditional careers, that is those careers in which women represent 25% or less of the

workforce.

TARGET POPULATION

The target population for the NEW project includes women who meet the eligibility requirements for JTPA as determined by the Baltimore County Office of Employment and Training, are at least 18 years of age, are Baltimore County residents, and have basic reading and math skills. The majority of clients have been women of low income according to federal guidelines, women receiving unemployment, and AFDC recipients.

RECRUITMENT

A variety of channels have been used for recruitment. Each month, a mass registration is held at the family service centers to enroll AFDC recipients in job training programs provided through PROJECT INDEPENDENCE. A staff member from the NEW project gives a brief overview of nontraditional employment, stressing the benefits of increased earnings, career advancement, and personal satisfaction. Women are introduced to the nature of nontraditional employment, including the physical requirements, working outdoors in various weather conditions, safety concerns such as working at great heights, and the isolation factor of possibly being the only female on the work site. Besides speaking to groups of women, project staff have presented the NEW program to the employment specialists at the Jobs Service, who distribute program flyers to female clients. Also, brochures are

distributed at jobs fairs and at local conferences to professionals who may refer women to the program. Press releases by the public relations department of the college have helped to publicize the program, as well as four television appearances and a radio interview. A logo contest was held at three area feeder high schools to publicize the program. Advertisements placed in the help wanted column have resulted in many inquiries from women interested in information about nontraditional employment.

WORKSHOPS

Interested women who qualify for federal job training are then invited to a one-day workshop to receive an orientation to nontraditional employment for women. Activities at the workshop include a comparison of male and female occupations, including the numbers and variety of jobs, and comparisons of the salaries. The participants become aware of the benefits and challenges of working in a nontraditional occupation by listening to an apprenticeship director describe the training and opportunities available in a union apprenticeship, viewing videos in which female nontraditional role models perform trades jobs and speak of their experiences, hearing from a tradeswoman first-hand, and participating in group discussions and activities. The benefits discussed include:

- Higher pay
- Medical and pension benefits
- Cross training and career ladder opportunities

- Self-satisfaction

The challenges discussed include:

- Isolation on the worksite
- Sexual harassment
- Nontraditional hours
- Transportation and child care
- Stereotyping

By the end of the workshop, attendees are ready to compile a list of qualities or characteristics they observed in nontraditional women from the workshop experience. The traits frequently mentioned include:

- Enjoyment of physical work
- Working with one's hands
- Satisfaction in seeing the results of one's work
- Enjoyment in working outdoors
- Not being afraid of dangerous equipment or heights
- Not minding soiled hands or clothing
- Confidence and a "thick skin"
- Being able to handle isolation and possible sexual harassment
- Willingness to pull one's own weight on a job
- Ability to work nontraditional hours

ASSESSMENTS

The women in the workshop decide whether they will return for an assessment day to help them ascertain the appropriateness of a nontraditional career at this time in their lives. The assessments include three subtests of the **Adult Basic Learning Examination (ABLE)**: number operations, problem solving, and reading comprehension. Most of the women who enter training qualify to take the highest level of the ABLE, Level Three, as indicated by the pretest, the SELECT-ABLE. Those women who take only the Level Two ABLE, indicating achievement lower than expected of an apprentice, must be willing to take remedial courses and be highly motivated or have a background in nontraditional work to succeed in the NEW Work for Women program. The math score is considered carefully in terms of possible remedial work because math skills are very important in the trades. The **Holland Self-Directed Search** is used as a good indicator of satisfaction in a trades career, and provides reassurance and confirmation to the women concerning their career choice. As one would expect, the majority of women who have succeeded in training have a fairly strong realistic code, indicating a preference for interacting with mechanical things. The **Myers-Briggs Type Indicator** is also given. Women in the program frequently have ST codes. Several **informal assessments** give information about educational background, relevant training, and previous work experience. The assessments allow each client to explore her skills, interests, personal characteristics, and

background to determine the appropriateness of a nontraditional career. A **personal interview** with the coordinator is then held to review the assessment data and to make an informed decision about pursuing training for a nontraditional career. Strong motivation is essential for any woman considering a nontraditional career in order to overcome the forces of social conditioning, self-doubt, and discrimination.

An **Individualized Program Plan** is written for each client to identify personal, academic, and vocational goals and to begin to overcome any barriers that might hinder her success, such as money, transportation or child care. Clients who are accepted into training receive a stipend for transportation expenses. Public assistance clients receive child care through the Department of Social Services.

The NEW Work for Women project offers two tracks which lead to nontraditional careers.

EDUCATIONAL/COUNSELING/PLACEMENT SERVICES

The first is the Educational/Counseling/Placement Services component in which a staff member assists the client by providing the following services:

- Career counseling
- Access to GED classes
- Referrals to math lab
- Tuition assistance information
- Career search activities

- Job finding assistance
  - Resume writing
  - Interview techniques
  - Job leads
  - Referrals to apprenticeship programs and on-the-job training opportunities
- Mentors
- Funding for short term training

INTENSIVE PRE-APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

A client may opt to enter the second track, the Intensive Pre-apprenticeship Program, a 12 week, full-time program of classroom training aimed at preparing for a career in the skilled trades. The following classes are held Monday through Thursday:

Introduction to the Trades features speakers from apprenticeship programs, companies seeking female employees, and organizations promoting the employment of women. Weekly field trips and hands-on experiences include climbing into a backhoe at the operating engineers facility, learning about back flow at the plumbers apprenticeship training facility, visiting a state highway construction site, soldering in the electrical lab at DCC, stapling roofing shingles and using surveying equipment at a local vo-tech school, building picnic tables for the college with female

carpenters, repairing dry wall at DCC, building wall racks using power tools, and touring companies which seek women workers in nontraditional capacities. Linkages were formed with two major tool companies which sponsor hands-on tool demonstrations for the students. Videos present information on specific nontraditional careers.

Industrial measurements classes teach the women how to use measuring tools such as scales, micrometers and calipers.

Career and life skills classes deal with issues of getting and maintaining a nontraditional job and dealing with the challenges of the nontraditional workplace.

Physical conditioning in the circuit center at the college develops upper body strength.

Basic Skills instruction is given in math, reading, trades vocabulary and problem solving.

Blue print reading includes the beginnings of mechanical drawing.

Occupational safety and health includes knowledge of OSHA regulations and a field trip to Bethlehem Steel's medical facility.

CPR and First Aid courses lead to certification.

Support group helps bond the women as they support each other in training and in the workplace.

Program funds have been used to assist clients with various expenses incurred in gaining employment or starting an apprenticeship, such as:

- Textbooks for beginning apprentices
- Apprentice registration fees
- Work boots
- Starter tools and equipment
- Physicals
- CDL learner permits
- Supplementary short-term courses
- Welder's shield

LINKAGES FOR JOB PLACEMENT

Dundalk Community College has close ties with the business and labor communities as well as a school and industry partnership. Continued outreach and advocacy with various employers from this partnership and from the community has resulted in interviews and placement opportunities for the students. On site visits to companies are made to explain the program and its benefits to the employer in terms of:

- no cost recruitment
- supportive follow-up services for those who are hired
- reduced employee turnover and time spent hiring
- pre-screened and qualified applicants

After the participants receive six weeks of instruction in the Intensive Pre-apprenticeship Program, employers and students are

brought together in the classroom and on field trips. This aspect of the program is especially important not only to assist in career decision making and to pave the way for employment, but because it involves the union apprenticeship training directors in the instructional process. The Baltimore Building and Construction Trades Training Council, AFL-CIO not only gave advice and guidance in the formative stages of the project, but continues to provide speakers for the workshops and the introduction to the trades component and field trip sponsorship to training facilities, presenting an overview of the nature and scope of work in a particular trade. Two members serve on the program's advisory board. The partnership with the union building trades has proven to be invaluable in opening the doors for program participants to enter apprenticeships. In the first year ten women were indentured as apprentices.

An early linkage with the State Highway Administration EO specialists, one of whom served on the advisory board, resulted in six placements during the first year. Other key advisory board members include an apprenticeship and training specialist, directors of technical programs at the college, the female vice-president of the Printing Industries of Maryland, the manager of the local office of the Department of Economic and Employment Development, and a planner from the Maryland Apprenticeship and Training Program.

MENTORS

Mentors are a key element in job retention and are obtained for each working client to assist them with questions or problems encountered on the job and to provide support. When field trips are taken to apprentice training facilities or when speakers visit from the trades, the coordinator requests that a female who has training or work experience in hat field be included. Some of these women have become mentors to the graduates. The training directors of the apprenticeship programs have also been helpful in giving referrals for mentors in specific trades.

JOB RETENTION ASSISTANCE

The job placement specialist is available to the new employee to assist her if a problem arises on the job. The aim, of course, is to deal with minor problems before they result in the client losing or leaving the job. Apprenticeship directors have also called on the program coordinator to assist in resolving difficulties encountered by new apprentices. Reunions are periodically held on a Saturday morning for all graduates as an opportunity to discuss/review common problems in an informal setting and receive support from other tradeswomen.

GRADUATION

For the students who have completed the 12 week course, the program holds a graduation ceremony and reception, the first graduation for many of the women. Graduates receive a

certificate of completion, attendance recognition, a leadership award to a woman chosen by the students, and a standard toolbox of 18 tools from SNAP-ON. The most moving part of the graduation ceremony for the first two cycles was watching the women in their finest dresses process from the hall to the tune of Masterpiece Theater, proudly carrying their new red tool boxes.

OUTCOMES

The following figures summarize the success of the NEW Work for Women program for the period of the demonstration grant:

1. Total number of women receiving NEW presentation.....600
   (goal of grant-200)
2. Total number of women attending one-day workshop..... 77
   (goal of grant-50)
3. Total number of women attending one-day assessment.....63
   (goal of grant-45)
4. Totals from both cycles and tracks
   - Enrollment in both cycles.....35
     (goal of grant-30)
   - Graduates of both cycles.....27
   - Total graduates placed.....21
   - Total all placements.....29
   - Total apprenticeships.....17
   - Total non-traditional placements.....26
     (goal of grant-20)

CHALLENGES

Recruitment

Clearly, nontraditional employment is not for all women. In fact, of the more than six hundred women receiving a NEW Work for Women orientation, only seventy-seven, or 13%, committed to attend a one-day workshop. Of those workshop attendees, sixty-three, or 82%, returned for an assessment day. Of those assessed, thirty-five, or 55%, were enrolled in the twelve-week program. The NEW Work for Women project encourages women to keep open the option of nontraditional employment until they have explored the possibilities, benefits, and liabilities. Because many women were not brought up to think of themselves in nontraditional roles and have not been exposed to the nature and scope of many nontraditional jobs, the orientations and workshops are vital to educating women about apprenticeship and other trades positions. Also, many women feel threatened by the disclosures of criticism, discrimination, and harassment that they hear about from tradeswomen. One of the key points to be made regarding recruitment and retention of clients is that a supportive environment must be provided during the workshop, assessment, and personal interview so that a woman can look at all her options while demonstrating her motivation and ability to commit to a twelve-week program.

Busting Myths

Myths abound that discourage women from entering careers dominated by the other gender. Project VOW in New Jersey has addressed the following myths in its Mythbusters video:

- Women are not strong enough to work as laborers
- Tradework is too dirty for women.
- Women don't need much money to support themselves.
- Females don't have the mathematical ability for tradeswork.
- Women who work in the trades are rough and tough.

The participation of several tradeswomen as role models can promptly dispel these myths.

Job Placement in the Building Trades during a Recession

Another challenge faced by the program was job placement in the trades during a recession which severely affected building and construction. Because union apprenticeship programs are dependent upon employment for the on-the-job training component of their programs, class sizes in the apprenticeship programs have been smaller than is customary during building booms. However, the NEW program was fortunate to have the full support of the director of the Baltimore Building Trades Council, AFL-CIO and the apprenticeship directors. Ten women were indentured as apprentices in the first year. Without the partnership with the building trades, the program could not have been successful.

Another factor contributing to the success of the program

is the 6.9% affirmative action goal for females in the workforce in each of the trade categories on federal aid construction contracts. A site visit by the job placement specialist gives the employer a full understanding of the preparation the NEW Work for Women students receive and how the program can help the company meet its hiring needs for females.

Working within the time constraints imposed by federal job training programs

The fourth challenge is operating within the constraints imposed by time lines in federal programs. Recruitment is affected by the timing of training cycles. Because the recruitment process is held over several months for each of the cycles of training, clients often have a significant wait for the beginning of the next training cycle, which can be as much as four months away. Some clients are lost during the wait. To retain interest, clients have opportunities to attend activities at the college relevant to their participation in the program, such as self-esteem workshops, job fairs, career search activities, field trips to nontraditional training programs, and lectures by guest speakers.

Also, Employment and Training guidelines specify that clients be placed in a job within 90 days, which precludes their matriculation into the regular college curriculum in cases where additional schooling may be desirable. Also, it is difficult to work with AFDC recipients in the educational/counseling/placement

component because of the SDA's need for clients to be in a training program which has definite start and end dates.

A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

For the future, the main concern is to secure funding from other sources to continue the initiatives developed during the period of the demonstration grant. The DOL grant from the Women's Bureau is for the initial phase of sixteen months, and is not renewable. Funding proposals have been submitted or are being developed.

Another look to the future involves working with young women and girls as well as boys in upper elementary school and middle school to broaden the career aspirations of these students and to send a powerful message about career choice and satisfaction in doing nontraditional work. A summer day camp experience at the college for young girls, which is included in one of the proposals, would allow them to explore nontraditional work with field trips, hands-on activities with tools, meeting female role models, and participating in other activities to debunk some of the stereotypes about women in the trades.

Also, a program is needed to address the issue of women over forty-five, who need to be informed about all types of nontraditional jobs, both the physically demanding jobs, and those requiring moderate or minimal physical activity. Such jobs as appliance repair, truck driver, survey technician, vending machine repair, and small engine repair require less than two

years training and minimal physical effort.

Other issues that continue to adversely affect women both in training programs and on the job are transportation, child care, and lack of medical insurance for adequate health care. These issues need to be addressed on the national level.